

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Council Chamber B, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil on Tuesday 31 January 2023.**

(10.35 am - 12.00 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Gerard Tucker (Chairman)

Barbara Appleby	Sue Osborne
Robin Bastable	Oliver Patrick
Ray Buckler	Lucy Trimnell
Andy Kendall	



Also Present:

John Clark (on-line via Zoom)
Sarah Dyke (on-line via Zoom)
Brian Hamilton (on-line via Zoom)
Tony Lock (on-line via Zoom)

Officers

Jan Gamon	Director (Place, Recovery, Arts & Entertainment)
Natalie Fortt	Regeneration Programme Manager
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer & District Solicitor (on-line via Zoom)
Karen Watling	Chief Finance Officer (on-line via Zoom)
Stephanie Gold	Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

86. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 January 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

87. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brian Hamilton, Paul Maxwell and Robin Pailthorpe.

Councillor Brian Hamilton was in attendance on-line via Zoom.

88. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

Councillor Barbara Appleby declared a personal interest for item 8 on the District Executive Agenda – Yeovil Crematorium, as she is the Parish Clerk for Yeovil Without Parish Council who have an 11% interest in the Crematorium.

Councillors Lucy Trimnell and Sue Osborne each declared a personal interest for items on the District Executive agenda, as they are also members of Somerset County Council, and decisions contained within the reports would have an impact on the new Somerset Council going forwards.

89. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

90. Issues arising from previous meetings (Agenda Item 5)

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

91. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman welcomed two Democratic Services Officers from Mendip District Council who were present as observers.

The Chairman noted this was his last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee as he was not able to be present at the March meeting. He sincerely thanked members of the Committee and their predecessors for their input, and the support everyone had provided to both himself and the Committee. He believed the Scrutiny Committee had been one of the most effective and able committees that he had worked with over many years of working with the Local Authority.

92. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 5 January 2023 (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman reminded members of the December and January meetings where the Section 106 Update report had been considered. He noted that the report had been circulated to all members either via a meeting of an Area Committee or via email. He encouraged members to read the report and respond with any queries.

93. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 2 February 2023 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 2 February 2023 and raised comments and questions as detailed below. Responses to many questions and comments were provided at Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officers or Portfolio Holder – except any marked by an asterisk.

Wincanton Town Centre Regeneration - Revisions to Timetable (Agenda item 6)

- Para 1 What is the total number of projects in South Somerset that have been deferred as part of this local government reorganisation capital expenditure review?

- Para 4 How can we be assured that Wincanton regeneration will go ahead in a years' time, given that that significant financial pressures on the new Somerset Council is likely to continue into 24/25 and beyond?
- Para 4 Regarding the business case that will be taken to the new Somerset Council, who will write this, and does this mean that the regeneration project goes back to square one in terms of the evidence base, consultation etc...
- *Para 7 How many key empty premises in the town have been brought back into use in the year 22-23?
- Para 10 Regarding the 1.902m being reprofiled into the 24/25 financial year, is there a risk that this is going to be reallocated by Somerset Council?
- Para 11 – 151 will review the revenue costs can be capitalised and funded by borrowing rather than earmarked reserves. Do we really want to be adding to the borrowing?
- Para 10 There is an inaccuracy in the Q3 proposed figures that needs to be corrected.
- Have there been any redevelopment works at The White Horse in Wincanton?
- Why has a risk matrix not been included in this report?
- How is the decision to defer the project going to be communicated to the people of Wincanton? There is reputational risk to this Council if it is not communicated appropriately.

SSDC Opium Power Ltd - distribution of 2022/23 half year profits (Agenda item 7)

- Para 5 Will SSDC's portion of the dividend be spent this year financial year 22/23, or will it be passed onto the new Somerset Council.
- Para 9 Why is this dividend not being used to reduce the total outstanding on the loan from SSDC to Opium Power Ltd as per Option 1 at Para 18 of the report?
- Para 5 Regarding the 900k being paid as dividend, this is close to the 1m limit set by the Section 24 notice, does the S151 officer at Somerset County Council have any influence on decision-making here?
- Para 18 and 19 refers to two possible options, why are these options not being presented to the District Executive for a decision?
- Para 20 Regarding the Net Present Value of 516k realised over 25 years, would this increase if interest rates rise?
- Para 22 Regarding the risk that profit may not outlast the term of borrowing, what could cause this and how likely is it?
- Is this a one-off amendment to the terms and conditions of the Shareholders agreement, and is there a risk that this sets a precedent for further dividend payments to be taken?
- Are the profits in this report referring to one facility, or all three of the battery storage facilities jointly owned by this Council and Opium Power Ltd (Taunton, Fareham 1 and Fareham 2)
- This is a hugely successful joint venture, and we should be celebrating the legacy that this is leaving for the new Somerset Council.
- Does this council hold more weight in financial decision-making as the majority shareholder on this joint venture?
- *How long are the leases on the 3 battery storage sites? Is there a risk that rents will be increased when landlords see how profitable these businesses are?

Yeovil Crematorium - Revisions to Timetable (Agenda item 8)

- The ward member and Clerk for Yeovil Without Parish Council expressed concern that this decision has been taken without consulting Yeovil Without Parish Council who are 11% shareholders in Yeovil Crematorium.
- Will Yeovil Without Parish Council remain 11% shareholders when ownership of the Crematorium transfers to the new Somerset council.
- This revision will impact Yeovil Without PC budgets going forward. Will Somerset Council be absorbing any extra costs that may be incurred whilst this project is on hold?
- How can we ensure that project is carried forward by the New Somerset Council as a priority?
- If this work is deferred, is there a risk that this facility will not meet the demands of the communities that use it.
- Some work has been done to increase capacity including a large carpark extension and service yard, now that the refurbishment of the Chapel is not progressing, is there a risk that these works now look like a waste of taxpayers' money?
- One member felt that by delaying these works there is a significant reputational risk to the Council.
- This facility provides a good income for the Council, can we be assured that the new Somerset Council will invest in this facility to maximise the income potential of the facility for years to come?

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 9)

- A member advised that she thought the item on the Ilminster Neighbourhood Plan may not be ready for the March meeting.

94. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 9)

There were no updates on matters of interest.

95. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 10)

There were no updates or discussion. Members were content to note the Work Programme.

96. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 11)

Members noted that the next meeting of Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 28 February 2023 at 10.30am, in the Council Chamber, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

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Chairman